

Getting Buy-In and Making Change Happen

Building a buy-in strategy can take time and effort, but most successful programs are based on just a few key steps.

- 1. Make your goal clear.** People have trouble achieving vague visions, so it helps to set a clear objective. You might try a quantitative approach, such as cutting landfill waste by thirty percent. Or, you might take a more qualitative tack, such as eliminating every possible ounce of landfill waste. Either approach can work if you follow the next steps.
- 2. Ask why it is hard.** Conducting a survey can tell you a lot about people's attitudes toward the goal and the barriers they encounter. Some barriers make compliance virtually impossible, such as a lack of recycling bins. You'll need to remove those barriers first. Other barriers might have more to do with perceptions, so you'll need to address those next.
- 3. Use a personal touch.** E-mails and memos are easy to ignore, but people are not. So you should ask people to commit to the program in person. The old adage about catching more flies with honey applies here: Coercion usually fails to get results.
- 4. Seek public commitments.** Your goal is to create new social expectations among your co-workers, and the best way to do this is to ask for commitments from groups of people. Try to involve everyone, so nobody can remain passive. This will help people see themselves as environmentally conscious and on the team. Whenever possible get them to sign up in writing — and do it in public — because written commitments are stronger than verbal ones. Getting commitments is a very big step, but many people will have difficulty staying on track, especially at first. The next step is to help people stick with the program until it becomes a habit.
- 5. Use prompts.** Reminders help, especially when they are easy to see and understand. Pictograms and simple words work best. Put them where you want people to make a change, such as above wastebaskets or recycling bins, in the copy room, or wherever you want people to change their behavior. Encouraging messages empower people while negative messages tend to turn them off.
- 6. Remind people of new norms.** Many factories have big banners reminding workers about the importance of safety and doing high-quality work. Reminding people about the company's sustainability goals is equally important.
- 7. Talk about progress.** Acknowledging progress and talking about challenges and barriers is an ongoing part of building new norms. Over several weeks or months, your Green program will begin taking on a life of its own.

We tend to think about our Green goals, but the art and science of changing behavior is an equally important piece of the puzzle. This outline can get you started on the right path.

Low-Hanging Fruit

The first step was measuring baselines. We joined the non-profit California Climate Action Registry (now The Climate Registry at www.theclimateregistry.org). We report energy used at our facility and fuel used in company cars each year and they verify our results. This gives us an easy way to track progress. Measuring landfill waste is easy too: we simply count the waste and recycling bins that get picked up each week.

Since we assumed cutting emissions would be difficult, we started with the lowest-hanging fruit. First, we traded the company SUV for a very fuel-efficient car. This decision immediately reduced fuel costs by nearly two thirds. But we also made one other change: Instead of visiting production partners in the middle of the day, we combined shop visits with commutes to and from work. Because of this change, a wider range of our staff now performs turnovers and quality-control inspections, which has forced some adjustments in our coordination habits. But the results have been astonishing: About 75 percent less business driving — and expense — with no changes in quality or service.

Next, we plugged our computers into power supplies to eliminate “vampire power” at night, and we called the electric company for help. The utility company sent us enough CFLs to re-lamp the building. The free light bulbs were a pleasant surprise, but the utility company could not help us with bigger-ticket items.

We learned that window films and a lighter colored roof would keep us cooler on hot afternoons, while an operable skylight would help vent the excess heat. Our building would need less energy as a result, so if the time ever came for larger expenditures on air conditioning or solar panels, we would need smaller, less expensive units.

But we never got that far. While we were weighing our options, events intervened and we had to replace our copier. We took the opportunity to select an efficient, multi-function machine and unplug three other printers that were located at our desks, plus a scanner and a stand-alone fax machine. The new copier's central location in the office means we now have to get up from our desks and take a short walk to collect printouts. This subtle change actually encourages us to print less often. The result: less paper waste and fewer machines to maintain with no impact on operating costs. Then, our air conditioner broke down and replacement became necessary. Even though we hadn't invested in the skylight, window films, or roof, we chose an energy efficient unit and upgraded the efficiency of our ducts too. Total cost was about seven thousand dollars.

The Big Surprise

With these simple changes, we reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 65 percent in just two years. Remember that California's overall goal is 80 percent over forty years. We are most of the way there already. At the same time, we also cut both landfill waste and recycling volumes in half.

None of these changes involved making sacrifices or paying high costs. We continue working normally in a very pleasant office. And finding ourselves so far ahead of schedule has inspired everyone. Window films, a skylight, solar power, and a drought-tolerant landscape remain in our plans, and I suspect we will find additional happy surprises along the way. Meanwhile, our clients and production partners are stepping up by printing less, reusing more properties, and choosing more recycled and sustainable materials. When an experiment works, it creates infectious energy.

We are just one company, of course, and every business will face a different set of opportunities and

limitations. But if a small business can make such dramatic changes so easily and inexpensively, most others can probably do the same. In other words, while we work on ways to Green our exhibit and events programs, we can answer the call to become Greener businesses too.

And the truth is, becoming a Greener business is pretty easy.

- Avoid Air Shipping: airfreight is the least efficient mode of transportation.
- Fly Nonstop: in most cases, flying nonstop takes less fuel and causes less pollution.
- Travel Virtually: e-meetings and teleconferences can replace some, if not most, business travel.
- Avoid Plastics: more than half of the world's oil resources are used to create plastics that we use only once.
- Avoid plastic bottles, re-use graphic substrates, choose recycled carpet, and recycle everything you can.
- Avoid Printed Literature: the high cost of last-minute printing, airfreight, and premium drayage has an environmental cost too.

In the end, your new Green message might boil down to this: Use what you need, but save the rest.

Found on, <http://www.exhibitoronline.com/topics/askmrgreenarchive.asp>